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A Glitch in the System: Religion as an Agent for Change in Science Fiction

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Abstract:

My paper focuses on religion as an ideology that allows for change within science fiction literature, examining religion in Frank Herbert's *Dune* trilogy and Octavia Butler's *Parable* series. In Herbert's works, religion disrupts various plans for humanity's future that direct humanity into complacency, dooming it. Religion, through a jihad, jars these plans, pushing humanity in a new direction that will lead to its survival. In Butler's works, Lauren Olamina, the protagonist, creates a new religion, Earthseed, in a dystopian near-future. Earthseed clashes with the fundamentalist Christianity present in the world, the former deifying change while the latter encourages regression. It also allows humanity to colonize other planets and escape the dying Earth. Both depictions of religion show the ideological system as disruptive, yet when mapped onto Raymond Williams' classifications of ideology, distinctions appear. *Dune*'s religion upholds the structures of empire already existing and becomes incorporated into the dominant ideology. As the post-jihad empire functions as before, the religion is a residual ideology that is either benign to or supports the dominant power structures. Earthseed, by contrast, resists the political conservatism and the fundamentalist Christianity of the dystopian Earth, fulfilling Williams' definition of a resistant ideology.

Introduction

Marxism has had a long relationship with science fiction (SF) literature. The former categorically displaces the faith of religion with an interest in humanity and the products we create. SF functions likewise, examining humanity's habits or interactions with technology and the outcomes these interactions may produce. Both Marxism and SF look towards humans and their products as the keys to progress in place of religion's belief in a higher power. In this way, both engage with a growing contemporary dismissal or lack of interest in religion, and thus are environments in which to explore these societal attitudes. That Marxism agrees with SF in the examination of humanity and technology, and that the two share similar attitudes towards religion, makes the intersection between the genre and the critical school a generative space for scholarship. Fredric Jameson, often called the leading American Marxist, features importantly within this space.

Jameson has written extensively from a Marxist viewpoint, producing significant works not only on capitalism but also on SF. His voice weighs heavily in this intersectional space, using

Marxist attitudes of relations of production to tease theories out of the genre. He defines SF as “[turning] on a formal framework determined by concepts of the mode of production rather than those of religion” (2005, p. 58), suggesting that SF is created through a fundamental unit of Marxist theory: the mode of production. That is to say, SF authors create worlds in futures based on economic systems—capitalism, feudalism, socialism, etc.—and imagine a corresponding superstructure or culture. Read through Jameson’s definition, then, SF is grounded in a material reality that conflicts with religion, an institution that relies on spirituality and the immaterial. While many authors concordantly dismiss religion as a mistake that hampers progress and the realization of a utopia, religion still exists in quite notable SF works, functioning as a mode of change and thereby complicating Jameson’s definition. This paper examines Frank Herbert’s SF monument, *Dune* and its sequels, and Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*. Within these works, religion, instead of undermining the Marxist dialectic, acts for it. Rather than inhibit SF’s material nature, these novels’ religions are woven into the materialism, and accelerate the development of these speculative societies. I argue that the use of religion in these texts shows religion and the irrationalism it carries as essential for human development rather than a systematic hindrance to it. Before embarking on the examination of texts, a brief glance at Marxism, SF, and religion is in order.

Science in Science Fiction

As the name of the genre implies, science functions importantly within SF worlds. It influences the genre through creating the environment of novels and short stories. Jameson’s definition of SF focuses on this aspect with the author extending a mode of production into the future. According to Marxist theory, society is composed of an economic system of production and a superstructure, the latter of which manifests as religion, education, or anything under the

catchall of “culture”. Because the mode of production is based in human labor, any event in an SF world must be similarly rooted in or driven by that labor. While it cannot provide magic or the supernatural, the labor can provide science and technology, which are devices that create the plausible nature of the SF world.

Human labor places constraints on the fictional world, and thus readers enter into SF with an expectation that anything occurring within the world will be explained or will at least have an implied explanation. The author need not reason through every event, but must depict every event as grounded in materialism, ensuring the event’s plausibility. This is what Mark Wolf calls the world gestalten: “in which a structure or configuration of details together implies the existence of an imaginary world, and causes the audience to automatically fill in the missing pieces of the world” (Wolf, 2012, p. 52). For example, Ursula K LeGuin’s award-winning novel, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, takes place on a planet called Winter. As the name implies, the planet has extremely low temperatures and large amounts of snow, ice, and other winter precipitants. The inhabitants of this world, Gethenians, have dozens of names for certain types of snow, can rattle off the caloric and nutritional value of nearly any food, and keep small hammers on tables to crack the ice that forms over a beverage between swigs (LeGuin, 2000). These Gethenian customs are odd to the reader, but given the environment in which the society is rooted, these habits make sense. The only real “leap of faith” required of the reader is that LeGuin’s setting could exist. If we concede that a planet with such conditions may exist, the culture and peoples seem quite reasonable. Likewise, science as technology can make the implausible become plausible.

In his classic, *The Time Machine*, H.G. Wells (2005) pushes readers thousands of years into the future with the eponymous device. While the novel does not focus on the machine, the contraption enables the plot to exist. Without it, Wells would be asking the reader to digest a

temporal leap from the modern time to 802,701 AD, a request that requires an incredible suspension of belief. Instead, Wells only asks the reader to believe in the possibility of this machine. He makes the request more palatable by explaining the fictional science behind it. The machine is a keystone, supporting Wells's plot arc by connecting the fictional present to the fictional future. It also functions as a stepping stone: the reader goes from the clearly plausible present to the slightly implausible time machine that enables the last step to the far future, a space this machine makes newly plausible. Thus, we reach distant planets and distant possibilities, the laboratories of the genre, through technology and science.

SF forces us to imagine futures, placing us into alien societies where we must quickly make sense of and adapt to what it around us. By allowing for any number of futures, SF prepares us for issues that may come to pass. The genre asks us to contemplate what we may face and to discuss how we will face it. It allows a glimpse into possible futures which, although they rarely constitute our future reality, nevertheless exercise our ability to adapt and may prepare us for discussions to come. Moreover, many speculations offer insight into present topics like technological advancements, political regimes, or human institutions. This paper examines speculations on one institution in particular: religion.

Defining religion is difficult. I borrow from Steven Hrotic (2014), who defines religion as “a social system, like any other within a given domain, which is legitimated by the claim of supernatural authority” (p. 11). I believe the most compelling quality of religion is the belief in the supernatural which entails a faith in the irrational. By this, I mean that religious creeds often rest on phenomena that cannot be confirmed or repeated, and so are unexplainable. Yet people will adhere to the phenomenon out of faith in its legitimacy; this belief is irrational by nature. A miracle, by definition, defies physics. Rationally, a person would not believe a miracle had occurred

because the integrity and inviolability of the laws of physics is the cornerstone of science and modern thought. A person may irrationally believe in the miracle—he knows it cannot happen, but it did happen. The belief is not upheld by evidence or scientific methods, but by faith in the event or idea.

The forward-looking nature of SF literature may apply to religion's function in society. It is true that some stories depict religion as static, holding much the same place in that world as it does in ours. Other stories imagine religion as a dynamic force, changing with humanity. Religion may be a tool to manipulate the masses or a self-fulfilling prophecy; it may die out in these speculative fictions, or it may be portrayed as essential to the survival of humanity. As SF prepares us to adapt to whatever futures we may encounter, so too can it help us examine how religion may function and change in those futures. Further, these futures may in turn give insight into religion's interactions with other ideologies.

Given the Marxist backdrop against which I examine these texts, I use a definition of ideology posited by Raymond Williams (1985) as “the set of ideas which arise from a given set of material interests or, more broadly, from a definite class or group” (p. 156). While exploring ideology, it is also helpful to keep in mind classifications Williams (1977) has given elsewhere. First, emergent ideology—a burgeoning ideology that opposes the ideology of the dominant ruling class and must either be incorporated or destroyed by the dominant depending on whether the emergent is alternative or oppositional to the dominant. That is, if an emergent ideology offers an alternative idea or value to the dominant and wishes to remain outside the dominant and left alone, it may well be. If the emergent offers an alternative and wishes to change society in lieu of this alternative, it is oppositional and draws a conflict with the dominant ideology. And second, residual ideology—practices or values from a previous social culture that have either been

incorporated into the dominant ideology or pose so little threat to the dominant ideology that they can remain intact and benign (pp. 121-127). One of the most well-known SF novels, Frank Herbert's *Dune*, deals at length with religion and its effect on masses of people, and that is where we now direct our attention.

Dune: A Hardship Continued

I focus first on the *Dune* trilogy because of the series' prominence in the genre. The first novel, *Dune*, is the best-selling novel in SF's history, and the *Dune* universe, continued through Frank Herbert's son, has grown to contain 30 novels and short stories. *Dune* was the first novel to win both the Hugo and the Nebula awards, two of the most prestigious awards in the SF genre. It has inspired video games, television series, and movies. Moreover, *Dune* is appropriate for this paper because of its religious themes. The prominence of religion, as well as *Dune*'s significance within the genre situate it as a canonical text when considering SF and religion. Indeed, Paul Atreides, the protagonist, is one of the best known messiahs in SF literature.

Paul, a young duke, becomes the messiah of the Fremen, a fanatically religious people inhabiting the outer-lying deserts of Arrakis, a planet colloquially known as Dune. As the product of generations of genetic engineering, Paul has superhuman abilities that are triggered by exposure to a drug called spice or melange. After consuming large amounts of spice, Paul obtains prescience and receives a vision:

The other path held long patches of grey obscurity except for peaks of violence. He had seen a warrior religion there, a fire spreading across the universe with the Atreides green and black banner waving at the head of fanatic legions drunk on spice liquor.

"I can't go that way," he muttered. "That's what the old witches of your schools really want."

"I don't understand you, Paul," his mother said.

He remained silent, thinking like the seed he was, thinking with the race consciousness he had first experienced as terrible purpose. He found that he no longer could hate the Bene Gesserit or the Emperor or even the Harkonnens. They were all caught up in the need of their race to renew its scattered inheritance, to cross and mingle and infuse their bloodlines in a great new pooling of genes. And the race knew only one sure way for this—the ancient way, the tried and certain way that rolled over everything in its path: jihad. (Herbert, 1990, p. 199)

Within the human race, there exists a desire to disrupt the rational plans laid by the mind, to break away from the consolidated civilizations into which humanity has developed. Assuming the mantle of messiah, Paul encounters the Fremen wish for jihad. Literally, “an effort,” in *Dune*’s context “jihad” is the violent effort of spreading the Fremen religion over the universe. Paul correctly identifies himself as the nexus for this jihad, the center from which the Fremen’s furor emanates. When Paul first encounters the jihad, its violence repulses him. However, after further consumption of the spice, Paul sees the violence not as a simple manifestation of fanaticism, but as a defense for humanity from other forces, such as genetic and political schemes that “lay massed like a thunderhead on his horizon, held back by no more than the Fremen and their Muad'Dib, the sleeping giant Fremen poised for their wild crusade across the universe” (Herbert, 1990, p. 586). The vision hints at the Golden Path, a road for humanity articulated later in the series. The factions—the Bene Gesserit, the Harkonnens, the Empire— in the vision each have goals for humanity that they try to pursue. These plans all turn on detailed extrapolations that map the future into streams of logical procedure. Paul, using his prescience, observes that these plans will eventually lead to humanity’s doom; the Fremen religion and its jihad, through massive violence and disruption, may lead to the adversity humanity needs to survive.

Paul uses religion to derail humanity, to divert its course. The Fremen religion disrupts these logical extrapolations, correcting humanity’s trajectory. The above vision shows this irrationalism as the dam holding the rational forces of the mind at bay, keeping humanity from

heading towards disaster. As a religion can resist these rational forces and move humanity towards a path of survival, it becomes essential to the development of the race. Once loosed, the fervor of religion overtakes Paul and extracts humanity from the hold of the controlling factions, diverting the human species towards another direction— one of survival rather than complacency and doom, developing humanity where logic and rationality have failed.

Earthseed: A New Religion

Octavia Butler, for the past few decades, has been one of the more prominent SF authors and has garnered much critical attention. She has won numerous awards including multiple Hugo and Nebulas, as well as the MacArthur “Genius” Grant. These accolades point to the significance of her work, and offer reason for examining her *Parable* series. Both *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents* focus on Earthseed, a religion created by Lauren Olamina, the series’ protagonist. Lauren articulates truths that she feels and, when collected, she finds they create a religious creed. The novels follow her as she tries to spread this religion that she believes is essential to the survival of humanity. Watching Earthseed’s inception allows us to observe the religion’s definition. Butler effectively has a *tabula rasa* with Earthseed, offers an interesting vantage point from which to see the creation of a religion and observe how and why it was created.

Butler sets the series in a near-future dystopia. Earth is ravaged by extreme global climate change and consequently the United States’ infrastructure is crippled and crumbling. Lauren, a teenager, lives in a suburb of Los Angeles. She, her family, and a dozen other families, have remained relatively safe within a walled-in cul-de-sac. Poverty inside the community, though it renders everyone destitute, pales in comparison to the outside where streets are strewn with sore-covered beggars, prostitutes, and corpses. For a brief time, we watch the community functioning

and observe Lauren's fear and frustration with the adults' nostalgia. Their desire is pointedly expressed in discussions over the approaching presidential race, as a friend of Lauren's tells her: "My mother is hoping this new guy, President Donner, will start to get things back to normal again," (Butler, 1993, p. 52). Eventually, drug abusers attack the community, killing most inhabitants and scattering Lauren's family. The rest of the novel follows Lauren as she travels north to Cape Mendocino, hoping to spread her religion, Earthseed.

The reader's interaction with Earthseed is largely through epigraphs. The first reads "All that you touch/You Change. /All that you Change/ Changes you. / The only lasting truth/ is Change. / God/ Is Change" (Butler, 1993, p. 3). This epigraph presents change as a fundamental philosophy of Earthseed. The religion deifies and embraces change as an omnipresent force. On a microcosmic level, this emphasis on change encourages development in Earthseed's followers. They embrace shifts in life, which allows them to better adapt and survive in Butler's harrowing world. By comparison, Christianity is shown as a rigid religion that discourages development.

The first novel in the series, *Parable of the Sower*, follows Lauren as she forms Acorn, a community of Earthseed believers, while the second, *Parable of the Talents*, explores the growth of Earthseed in the face of a conservative and violent Christian faith. Set a few years after the first novel, the second portrays Acorn as a stable and relatively safe community. However, Senator Jarret, a fundamentalist Christian, becomes president and under his reign Christian bands roam the country, "educating" the impoverished and those of other religions. One such group, Jarret's Crusaders, targets Acorn. They storm the community in tank-like vehicles, taking the children and shipping them elsewhere to live with good, Christian families, and enslave the adult population. The Crusaders enforce an archaic law, notably in their relegation of women to silent, subservient roles. Their behavior marks an effort to resurrect a social code and society from the past.

Marcus Olamina, Lauren's brother, shows that this wish for the past is not restricted to the Crusaders, but seems to be a trait carried by Christians. When her home is ransacked in the first novel, Lauren loses track of her family. Believing everyone dead, she moves from L.A. to northern California where she founds Acorn. Her brother, Marcus, survives the attack and joins a squatter community in L.A. There, he falls into his father's place, preaching Christianity to the dregs of the street. After four years, the city breaks up the squatter community and Marcus, left to his own, is enslaved, raped and tortured. Lauren sees him in a town, buys his freedom, and brings him to Acorn. There, remembering the respect his preaching drew from the squatters, he preaches again. Earthseed congregations, however, are discussions in which the community may question and discuss the ideas presented. When Marcus challenges the followers about their faith, they push back, pointing to flaws in Marcus's reasoning, to which he responds in an irritant and foolish manner. Chagrined, he leaves the community, rejecting Earthseed and its philosophies. Marcus experiences change, but rather than flexing and mirroring the changes, he grows stiff and brittle, longing for the past and working to bring it into the present

By contrast, the citizens of Acorn adapt remarkably well when Christian fundamentalists enslave them. Despite the abduction of their children and the death by force or by suicide of friends, Lauren and others adjust to the invasion of Jarret's Crusaders. The captives bide their time, wait for a moment of weakness, and then revolt, killing their captors and fleeing the camp. The group of survivors separates into smaller parties, each following their own path and doing what they feel they must to survive. They acknowledge what has happened, interpolating the past into themselves, and move forward. Lauren herself recuperates, then resumes her mission of spreading Earthseed and finding her now kidnapped daughter. Her faith in Earthseed has not been shaken, nor does she seek a restoration of the past as Marcus does:

God is Change. I wrote the words, then settled back to think about that. I find that I haven't thought much about Earthseed in the past few months. I believe its teachings helped me, helped all of us to survive Camp Christian. God is Change. I've lost none of my belief. I need to create something wide-reaching and harder to kill... I must create a new fashion in faith—a fashion that can evolve into a new religion, a new guiding force that can help humanity put its great energy, competitiveness, and creativity to work doing the truly vast job of fulfilling the Destiny. (Butler, 1998, p. 295-297)

Lauren learns from her past experiences, examining her time at Camp Christian with a scavenger's eye, thinking of what she can salvage from the experience. She realizes that her mission cannot be so tangible, and adjusts it accordingly. Earthseed produces this attitude. Rather than revert back to old lifestyles, it promotes learning, adapting, and developing on a personal level. Beyond the personal, Lauren explains why humanity needs a new religion: it will guide people towards the job of Destiny, towards emigrating from Earth.

Earthseed's goal of moving humanity to the stars is a vast change in the nature of civilization. The capitalist mode of production brings society to the cusp of this transition through negligent environmental attitudes that create the dystopic setting. While capitalism is not explicitly condemned, the corporations within the *Parable* universe demonstrate capitalism's part in bringing this environment into existence. In *Parable of the Sower*, Lauren hears of privatized cities, cities owned by companies who house their employees, supposedly providing for and protecting them as well. Lauren writes, "I think the new hires would be in debt to the company. That's an old company-town trick—get people into debt, hang on to them, and work them harder. Debt slavery" (Butler, 1993, p. 107). These privatized cities are a critique of capitalism. Serving as standard-bearers for this mode of production, they display a willingness to exploit without little regard to stewardship. Out of these circumstances rises Lauren's Earthseed, which may conceivably lead to new modes of production on different worlds. Religion, rather than an economic system, makes this development possible.

During her proselytizing, Lauren gains a disciple named Len. At one point, the two discuss Lauren's strategies for Earthseed. Len identifies the immense task of realizing Earthseed's Destiny and Lauren replies:

Some people might want to do it for the sake of their children—to give them the chance to begin again and do things right this time. But that idea alone won't do it. It won't bring in enough people, money, or persistence. Fulfilling the Destiny is a long-term, expensive, uncertain project... Politicians, on the other hand, are short-term thinkers, opportunists, sometimes with consciences, but opportunists nonetheless. Business people are hungry for profit, short- and long-term. The truth is, preparing for interstellar travel and then sending out ships filled with colonists is bound to be a job so long, thankless, expensive and difficult that I suspect only a religion could do it... It will take something as essentially human and as essentially irrational as religion to keep them focused and keep it going—for generations if it takes generations. (Butler, 1998, p. 361)

Only religion can guide people for so long a time on so irrational and personally unrewarding a quest. Religion, to Lauren, is necessary for the salvation of humanity.

Developing Through Religion

Humanity is prone to irrationality. When this irrationalism is engaged it overcomes other natural instincts such as self-preservation. Lauren articulates this above, noting that Destiny could never occur based on logical institutions alone as humans lose sight of humanity's survival, looking to their own personal utility. The irrational trait, however, can overcome this self-preservation, allowing us to deny ourselves for the sake of a larger goal. Religion offers a way to capitalize on this irrationality. In Butler's novels, Earthseed makes Destiny possible, uniting people in an effort that, though personally unrewarding, saves the human race. Likewise, in Herbert's series, organizations such as the Bene Gesserit—a group that charts and manipulates breeding over generations—focus on a goal for humanity, and while they plan on large scales of time, Paul sees on yet a larger scale that these goals are unhealthy. Moving away from this plan requires the irrationality of religion and the Fremen jihad.

While both series use religion as a vehicle for developing humanity, the nature of this development differs. Herbert's Fremen religion manifests most significantly in the jihad. A religion exists behind the violence that washes across the universe, but the religion is merely a facade for the violent disruption itself. It is the event, not the religion, that redirects humanity. Contrary to this, Lauren Olamina seeks to found a new religion because of the sustained ideological impact it would have. Because the Fremen religion is used as an event, while Earthseed is used for ideological purposes, the two religions interact differently with the existing ideologies of their respective societies.

Earthseed is an emerging ideology. Though religion generally may be a residual ideology, in that it has existed and has been incorporated by the dominant capitalist system as shown by Christianity, Earthseed's creed abruptly departs from incorporated religions and fundamentally opposes the capitalist society. Earthseed's assertion that "God is Change" clashes with the conservatism of Christianity and the economic mode of production, both of which act from nostalgia and yearn for a return of old Earth. Butler draws parallels from this fictional future towards our real past throughout the series. The collars put on prisoners, for example, harken back to antebellum slavery. Of course, capitalism does progress through creating new technologies. However, when capitalism produces innovation, the technology is used for nostalgia or, at best, a distancing from the world, which we see in the virtual reality room where Len's mother spends every waking moment (Butler, 1998, p. 130).

The Christian fundamentalist group, Jarret's Crusaders, embrace this mantra of nostalgia by preaching a reversion to antiquated social philosophies. Namely, they reiterate gender roles, believing, among other things, that women to be subservient to men and that women should not speak unless spoken to. Earthseed opposes this attitude of retrograde progress by deifying Change

and teaching adaptation rather than rigidity—a willingness to embrace new lifestyles rather than cling to old. With change at the heart of Earthseed, incorporation of the faith into the dominant ideology is unlikely. Rather, Earthseed contradicts Christianity and capitalism, allowing an ideological transition to occur. However, this transition can only succeed in creating a different society if it takes place on Earth while in opposition to capitalism.

Earthseed's opposition to the capitalist society gives the religion its ideological clout. When cast against a capitalist background, Earthseed provides a fresh and subversive philosophy of life. This contrast of ideologies allows for a comparison of and choice between the two. Having chosen, one's choice is continually reinforced by the reminders of the conflict and the presence of the unchosen ideology. The contrast is further exacerbated when the ideologies manifest concretely: that Earthseed created a group of believers who lived together allowed the religion to be attacked by Christianity in a real and tangible form.

However, if we move from one superstructure, that of Christianity and capitalism, to a place devoid of superstructure, our own ideologies expand to fill the space. When exposed to a new planet these ideologies will dictate the values enacted upon the planet, creating the new colony and forming the new superstructure. If we look beyond Butler's texts and into the future they propose, into *Destiny*, Lauren's religion may fail to extinguish the ideological shards of the capitalist society buried in the minds of the colonists. The colonists may alter some aspects of capitalism, identifying and fixing problems within the system, but Earthseed seems unlikely to become the hegemonic force needed to rival and push out the economic system in which many of the colonists were raised. Until Lauren's religion can control the horizon of thought, can be the rule rather than the exception, capitalist ideals may still germinate within *Destiny*.

While Earthseed opposes the dominant existing ideology and mode of production, the Fremen jihad of *Dune* reinforces it. The feudal structure of Herbert's universe goes largely unchanged. Great Houses and individuals move in and out of power, yet the power is still held in the same spots as before the jihad. The Fremen religion rises to prominence against the previous emperor, proclaiming Paul a messiah, but this religion is entirely incorporated into the dominant ideology as it supports Paul as the new emperor. In effect, the religion becomes the most prominent repressive state apparatus of the Empire, a military force used to reproduce the dominant base and superstructure throughout the galaxy (Althusser, 2001, p. 1492). Indeed, an ideological shift is not the religion's purpose. Rather, for Paul, the religion functions only as a lever to push humanity onto his desired path. In *God Emperor of Dune*, we see that the Fremen jihad has helped place the galaxy on what is called the Golden Path; the Path itself relies on logic, rationality, and an all-powerful central figure in order to ensure humanity's existence. Thus, the ideological framework of the galaxy has only received a jolt to the system from the jihad and resumes functioning as before. While the system experiences change, the logics and structures of this post-jihad society parallel and mimic those that existed before the religious event.

In creating religion as a mode of development, Butler and Herbert show religion as an agent of change in a genre defined by its materialism and its divergence from the fantastic and religious. Referring back to Jameson's definition of SF as "[turning] on a formal framework determined by concepts of the mode of production rather than those of religion", both Herbert and Butler build societies that conflict with this, societies in which the way forward is through the immaterial system of faith. In showing religion as essential to humanity's development, these authors place it as a tool next to science and rationality. Humanity cannot proceed or progress in a balanced fashion without religion. In Butler's world, if limited to an idea of rational progress, humanity leans toward

greed, toward exploitation and dehumanization of others. For Herbert, rational progress leads eventually to a state of complacency that serves as humanity's demise. Religion, rather than conflicting with material developments of humanity, functions within those developments, initiating them or fulfilling a role that cannot be filled through another institution or more rational device.

Both Butler and Herbert's series complicate Jameson's definition of SF. Protagonists Lauren Olamina and Paul Atreides use religion as a tool for social change. Religion becomes not simply a product of the mode of production, but could supposedly stimulate the development of a new mode, or move humanity into a space that calls for a new means of production. *Earthseed* encourages its followers to embrace the only constant of life—change—and uses this to spread humanity to the stars. While the ultimate fate of *Earthseed* as an ideology is ambiguous, it is significant that the religion is the only path of action for humanity to escape the dystopic Earth. Similarly, Paul, as a messiah, releases a jihad across the universe to put humanity on a track towards survival, avoiding the plans laid down by rational organizations that would drive humanity into a dooming complacency. In each series, religion fills a vital role and allows humanity to develop in new directions. This is not to say religion is essential and manifests in all SF works, but rather that religion's existence in SF may be more complicated than many authors show. While scientific thought as the cornerstone of SF eschews religion, the ideological system of faith may provide alternative paths of development.

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